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Title: **Undocumented Acts: Migration, Community and Audience in Two Chicana Plays**

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Undocumented Acts: Migration, Community and Audience in Two Chicana Plays

Abstract

The 1980 Refugee Act endeavoured to provide effective settlement for refugees entering the United States. But most South American refugees escaping from dictatorships and civil wars were denied political asylum. This article explores the representation of migration and border crossing in *Latina* (1980), a play by Milcha Sánchez Scott that stages the difficulties associated with this journey. In 2010 Senate Bill 1070, one of the strictest anti-immigration legislative acts to be enforced, encouraged racial profiling in the identification of border crossers in the state of Arizona. *Detained in the Desert* (2011), a play by Josefina López, is a Chicana response to the passing of SB 1070, and contributes to a deeper understanding of the fraught experiences of migrant women's lives. The study of the plays places an emphasis on transnational community building and audience engagement and builds on a range of recent critical work by border theorists and scholars such as Alicia Schmidt Camacho and Deborah Boehm, and theatre and performance critics such as Diana Taylor.

KEYWORDS

Chicana Theatre US-Mexico Border Gender Migration Undocumented Trauma Audience

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This article explores border crossing in relation to Chicana theatre, focusing in particular on two plays that are based in California and Arizona. *Latina* (1980), a play that explores border crossing and the lives of undocumented domestic workers, was written by Milcha Sánchez-Scott after working in an employment agency for maids in Beverly Hills and later based the play on her experiences there. Josefina López also personally experienced the undocumented life in the USA for many years, and the threat of deportation and issues associated with the border informs several of her characters and works including *Detained in the Desert* (2011), the second play that I discuss here. These plays not only foreground women's experiences of the trauma of displacement but also highlight the 'hidden acts' or spaces of resistance within which an ethnic sense selfhood and community can be reclaimed (Boehm 2012, 271). To this end I compare the plays using an interdisciplinary theoretical perspective that places an emphasis on gender as well as the historical and cultural context of the plays.

Latina was one of the first Chicana plays to address the issue of identity and migration across the US-Mexico border, staging the journey of a South American girl before focusing on her shared experiences in a domestic service workers agency in Los Angeles. In many ways the play draws attention to the mass displacement of many central South Americans, especially women, during the decade of the 1980s when the US government was geopolitically implicated in undeclared civil wars in several South American states. During this time, many Central Americans including Guatemalans, Nicaraguans and Salvadorans, fled their home countries due to the violence and economic state (Rodríguez 2001; Padilla 2013). But the United States Congress brought successive immigration laws into existence that passed restrictions on immigration, and some government programmes also began

deporting border crossers who were seeking political and economic asylum in the United States (Rodríguez 2001, 388). In addition, the 1980 Refugee Act which established refugee and asylum classifications in the United States, simultaneously 'rejected most central American applicants' (Rodríguez 2001, 388). The Central American refugee subsequently became the subject in a range of U.S. Latina/o literary works, including Chicana literature and drama, in ways that emphasised gender as an important and integral aspect of migration. Cherríe Moraga's work on Third World and international feminism in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1983), Helena Maria Viramontes' *The Cariboo Café* (1984) and Sonia Saldívar Hull's *Feminism on the Border: Chicana Gender Politics & Literature* (2000) among many others, explicitly engage with the plight of the migrant woman of colour. Camacho (2008) similarly notes the reconfiguration of Chicana feminism during this period of time and acknowledges the emergence of 'a distinct female imaginary operating in the border space' (242). With its focus on the experiences of migrant women and the US- Mexico border, *Latina* can be appositely situated within this body of Chicana feminist texts.

Chicana theatre criticism focuses on *Latina* as one of the first plays to closely explore identity within the framework of border crossing and specifically how identity becomes constructed as subjects move across borders (Arrízon 1999, 101). One of the central characters in the play experiences this. During the opening scene the audience see how 'NEW GIRL' journeys from Peru to a new life in the United States,

> *The stage is dark. Then we hear Peruvian flute music coming from a distance. We see* NEW GIRL *saying goodbye to a small group of PERUVIAN MOUNTAIN VILLAGE PEOPLE. The time is dusk.* NEW GIRL *is carrying a satchel. She has a Peruvian shawl around her shoulders. Her hair is in braids. She has on a peasant skirt and a work shirt and sandals on her feet* (85).

In this scene there is no dialogue, there are only actions and sounds that indicate the process of personal transformation and leave-taking that the young girl undergoes. As she leaves, her mother 'steps out and puts a St Christopher medal' around her neck, and 'embraces NEW GIRL' before 'her mother falls to her knees weeping' (85). It is clear then that the girl's border crossing entails radical insecurity and loss, figured in the rupture of kinship as she separates from her mother and home (Camacho 2008, 275-6). This is realised on stage as a disorientating darkness, and as a series of rapid interactions between the girl and a number of violent and dangerous predators. The border in this scene can thus be framed in theoretical terms as a gendered 'extra-legal space' where 'paradoxically "illegal" practices take place,' as the audience see her 'pay off' a policeman, interact with 'a slick Coyote' or human trafficker, and avoid rapists who all prey on the vulnerability of the girl (Boehm 2012, 99):

> *At one point we see* NEW GIRL *paying off a policeman. Another moment a woman steals her shawl. Then a man accosts her at knife point and tries to rape her, but she escapes. Next, she is giving money to a slick city coyote, dressed in American type work clothes, who takes her to the end of the tunnel, where it is night* (85).

By the end of her journey the new girl can only see and hear '*the moon and the sound and search light of an over head helicopter'* and '*a large barbed wire fence*' (85). The playwright thus situates the girl's experiences during her crossing against a background of darkness, searchlights, gendered violence and 'heart beating escape' music in ways that reflect the 'U.S. state's production of illegality' (Boehm 2012, 102). Crossing the border makes women more vulnerable as they migrate, and this is intensified by U.S. immigration policies. The audience witness this as the girl experiences harassment, exploitation and unequal power relations in specifically gendered forms.

As the border is framed as both a tunnel and a fence through which the girl must crawl, her journey is then '*por la tierra*'(by land) and '*como mojada*' (undocumented) rather than '*por la linea*' (via a border station with false papers) (Boehm 2012, 96-98). Her initiation into this undocumented way of life is made tangible in the play in covert terms through the use of spotlights and search lights, and through the physical acting of the characters on stage as they evade the border surveillance by careful timing and crawling on all fours, '*They both hit the ground and crawl on hands and knees to the barbed wire fence. She crawls through. He helps her…The coyote waves* NEW GIRL *on*'(85). It is significant that the border crosser remains anonymous throughout this scene and that she is simply known as 'New Girl' during the journey, thus indicating the covert nature of her crossing to the United States. As an undocumented border crosser the 'new girl' begins to lose her identity and we do not get to learn her real name at this point in the play, only her gender. Once she arrives in *el norte* (the north) she is initially abandoned in a car park in Beverley Hills where she is left disorientated and profoundly confused.[1] The other women in the agency have also experienced this type of journey and state bitterly that,

> They don't care. It was the same when I came. The policeman on the road wants his *mordida* (bribe).What the police don't get, the bandits take. Better for them if it's a woman. Then they try to get paid in other ways or sometimes they just kill the people (107).

The girl's gendered experience of border crossing is very similar to that of the other women in the domestic agency as each of them have experienced difficulties crossing national borders coming from Guatemala, El Salvador, Colombia and Cuba. Some of the women have green cards, but many do not and live in fear of deportation, a fear that is made tangible through the many references to the IRS (immigration control) or *la migra* (the police) in the play. Characters fear being followed and spied on or are finally 'herded' amid screams and

protests by immigration officers during the climax in the closing moments of the play, 'SARITA *walks slowly to stage apron. As lights get dimmer we hear voices of immigration officers herding the women. Women's screams and protests are heard. Some women call SARITA with requests to call relatives'*(141). Instead of fulfilling the prevailing stereotype of being "redemptively transformed" into U.S Latino (im) migrants, these scenes ultimately highlight how the undocumented women remain as 'depoliticized labor migrants' imprisoned within the racialised juridical systems and infrastructures that bar them from obtaining full citizenship status (Rodríguez 2001, 387). As the play proceeds it becomes increasingly clear that rather than being a safe space for recently arrived migrant women, the domestic agency instead increasingly reproduces the intersecting structures of gender, race and class inequality.

Attention is drawn to the ways that perceptions of the Latina women in the agency are informed by debilitating racial stereotypes for example. Most tellingly this occurs when a white customer returns one of the women from the agency and states via an orientalising discourse that she is not suitable as a domestic maid:

> MRS.HOMES: …She has no respect for my blue and white Chinese porcelain, or any of our antiques and these things are irreplaceable, you know. Where do you people get these girls? (ALMA *sits there in total disgrace*) …I'll be more than happy to go higher for a proper person. I'd go to, say, $100 a week…Some of our friends have Orientals. I hear and can see they are efficient. Oh, yes, indeed, and very clean, energetic, too…now, you Mexicans… (*at this* SARITA *turns her head with a start and looks directly at* MRS. HOMES)…have the best dispositions. You know your place (109-110).

It is clear from exchanges such as these that the Latina women are profoundly disadvantaged by their ethnicity. As racialised women the Latinas are less 'acceptable' and paid lower wages than women of other ethnicities. The playwright negatively contrasts the relative social position of women from other ethnicities with that of the Latinas, thus highlighting how the agency converts them into unequal commodified workers. The Latinas are forced to accept their lower place within this racialised border labour economy in various ways; some are forced into sexual subordination and exchange sexual favours for work, others are degraded or humiliated because of their race and class, prompting Sarita to state early in the play, 'I don't want to look Latina' (86). As a wannabe film and TV actress Sarita directly experiences several negative images that the white media produces of Mexicans and Latinas. Camacho (2008) states that, 'During the 1980s, the U.S. media aided in racializing Mexicans as illegal subjects as parasitic undocumented immigrants and irredeemable gang members' (210). Rather than suggesting the complexity of Chicana representation, such stereotypical images profoundly limits the kind of acting parts Sarita can expect to find:

> I'll give you my credits. I was a barrio girl who got raped by a gang in *Police Story*, a young barrio mother who got shot by a gang in *Starsky and Hutch*, a barrio wife who got beat up by her husband who was in a gang in the *Rookies*. I was even a barrio lesbian who got knifed by an all-girl gang called the Mal-Flores…that means Bad Flowers. It's been a regular barrio blitz on television lately. If this fad continues, I can look forward to being a barrio grandmother done-in by a gang of old Hispanics called Los Viejitos Diablitos, the old devils (89).

Sarita's character analysis suggests that her identity is a social construct informed by US perceptions of her ethnicity and stereotypical representations perpetrated by the white dominated media. Despite these oppressive racialised conditions there are nonetheless many instances in the play when Sarita and the Latina women contest the gendered and racialised

structures of ethnic and class domination. As I go on to discuss, not only does the agency become a site for the formation of transnational feminism, but also, crucially, as Arrízon (1999) asserts, a place for 'developing and preserving solidarity among women' (104).

The play foregrounds the difficulties several of the Latinas in the agency have in finding work due to issues with the English language, identity and racial profiling. In Act I Scene 3 they are made acutely aware of both 'the formal and informal barriers to citizenship' they face, particularly the many bureaucratic obstacles that recent refugees and migrants encounter (Villalón 2010, 41-119).These obstacles and forms of discrimination are embedded in US laws that govern citizenship. The new girl encounters this when she is unable to fill in the application form for a job because it is written only in English. Sarita and the other Latinas in the agency help her to fill in the form, translate it for her, and attempt to quickly teach her English, but the difficulties associated with being an undocumented newcomer include other obstacles such as the lack of registration, a permanent address and social security number. The audience are shown how the women get around this difficulty when the agency workers use their own addresses and social security numbers for the new girl's application. The women's actions in these scenes present a re-enactment of Latina 'transnational solidarity' and thus a space of resistance to both the business of Felix Sanchez and the systemic obstacles to citizenship they face.

The lead character, Sarita, controversially plays a vital role in transforming some of the other Latina women in the agency into stereotypical '*gringas*' (white women) in order for them to integrate and find a job. In much the same way as other ethnic American writing that focuses on migration and integration, the women in this play are similarly persuaded to change their names. In the second act the audience learn that Chata's daughter has changed her name to Connie Gar, an American version of her full Mexican Catholic name. The lead character Sarita also changes her name into what she considers to be a more acceptable name

for an actress in the United States. The new girl's name also changes throughout the play. At first she is known as 'Miss Peru' by one of the other women working at the Agency, instead of her full name, Elsa Maria Cristina López de Moreno. Later when the new girl is about to start her new job her name also gets shortened to Elsa Moreno, and finally it is shortened to Elsie, marking how her ethnicity becomes 'a constitutive absence' during this process (Camacho 2008, 240).There are even so several other radical transformations required in order for the Latinas to seem more acceptably 'American.' In two scenes Sarita changes the physical appearance of two of the women in order that they can conform more successfully to white American norms. The new girl's physical image changes throughout the play; from the initial description of her appearance when she first leaves Peru when she was dressed in 'a peasant skirt and a work shirt and sandals on her feet,' to '*an Americanized version of* NEW GIRL, *with a new slick hairstyle, make-up and* SARITA'S *clothes*' (133). The renaming and change to different dress codes, or the 'simultaneous transformation' of the women's bodies not only reflects their attempts at integration but also mimics the process by which their work consumes their identities (Camacho 2008, 240). With these troubling transformations in identity in mind I now go onto discuss several other equally important instances or 'hidden acts' by which the Latinas contest this dehumanising process (Boehm 2012, 271).

Not all of the characters are content to undergo the transformations in identity outlined above. The character Lola protests at the changes in identity expected of her by her employer stating that 'Each day you make me more nobody, more dead. You put me in a nice white uniform so I won't offend your good taste. You take away my name, my country. You don't want a person, you want a machine. My name is Lola. I am from Guatemala'(138). Sarita also undergoes a crisis in her ethnic consciousness, realised on stage in Scene 3 as flashbacks to childhood and the appearance of the nuns who confused her ethnic sense of self. Later when mannequins come to life, she is conversely encouraged by one of them to more

fully embrace her ethnicity, 'I will teach her. I will teach her not to be ashamed. I will show her the statues of Francisco de Zúñiga and she will see how it is to be a strong, proud Latina' (111). Humour also plays an important role in contesting the women's subjection, and forms bridges between the action on stage and the audience members. The many speeches delivered by Sarita that directly address and often interact with the audience members have a similar effect:

> (SARITA *walks to stage apron, as all women slowly and calmly gather around T.V., taking sandwiches out of bags and passing food among themselves.* SARITA *to audience)* We need a break. *(As lights fade to dark, we hear commercials from T.V. T.V. stays on all during intermission*) (113).

Sarita's appeal for 'a break' directly addresses the audience and indicates a crossing of boundaries that reoccurs throughout the play. These interactions often take place on the 'stage apron'- a threshold between the action on stage and the audience members, again re-emphasising the border crossing framework of the play. The mostly bi-lingual exchanges made between the women on stage are an expression of their 'border tongue' (Anzaldúa 1987, 55). This again re-emphasises cross border subjectivity and can be considered to be an act of transnational resistance (Arrízon 1999, 112). Ultimately it is these aspects of *Latina*, that is the oppositional acts committed by the Latinas, their communal involvement in transnational feminist activities, their bi-lingual dialogue and their engagement with the audience while on stage, that demonstrate how border crossing is staged and how a sense of Latina selfhood and community is reclaimed in the play.

Although separated by over 30 years, similar staging of transnational community building and audience engagement to this also occurs in Josefina López's play, *Detained in the Desert* (2011) as I go onto discuss. What differentiates the two plays most profoundly

though, are the radical changes to border crossing that have occurred during this period of time, and thus the way this is represented on stage. During the 1990s due to an increase in south-north migration largely brought about through neoliberal economic policies such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the devaluation of the Mexican peso, *maquiladoras* (assembly plants) proliferated, economic refugees became more prevalent, and the US-Mexico border became more militarised. Various border law enforcement agencies and several governmental operations also attempted to seal off sections of the border. In Texas, Operation Hold the Line began in 1993, in California, Operation Gatekeeper came in force in 1994, and in Arizona, Operation Safeguard appeared in 2003. In the California-Arizona sectors the consequences of these economic and border control measures has resulted in border crossers using liminal spaces such as 'the devils highway' or '*camino del diablo*' which is located in the Sonora-Arizona desert (Aldama 2012, 371). This desert area is marked by extremes of heat and cold, and many migrants die of hypothermia, suffocation and more recently also border patrol shootings. These crimes committed against migrants have created 'the specter of a new governmentality' in the region and a 'necropolitical order' whereby certain lives are deemed more expendable than others, and violence and fear have become the norm (Camacho 2008, 265). *Detained in the Desert* focuses on the traumatic consequences of these new forms of government and border control. Diana Taylor's work on trauma and the significance of community based performance as political response informs my reading of the play, as do current debates on 'presence' and 'affect.'

López's play is a response to the passing of Senate Bill 1070 (2010) in Arizona, the 'Support our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighbourhoods Act' which legitimised racial profiling in the identification of illegal immigrants in the state. While the set is minimalist, its multiple set locations suggest a different kind of border space to that expressed in *Latina*. In this play the set is comprised of several spaces such as the '-KRZT 1070 radio station DJ

booth; front seat of a car; a tent somewhere in the desert; a road somewhere in the desert; a Detention Center in the desert; a Water Station; and Ernesto's SUV' (20). These multiple carceral and desert based locations relate the radical shifts in migration patterns from those of the 1980s when *Latina* was first written and produced to a more contemporary setting**.** The content as well as the aesthetic style of the play, what the playwright terms 'cineteatro', are in addition a thematic and formal attempt to represent contemporary migration and subvert dominant stereotypical representations**.** Tiffany Ana López (2011) states that, 'cineteatro' has important 'cinematic elements' such as 'a sense of highly directed framing and editing, including the appearance of jump cuts' in order to 'expand the narrow frames of reference that shape and inform our thinking' (17). The action of the play that moves quickly from a DJ booth to a tent in the middle of the desert, and from the interior of a car to an interrogation room in a detention center, effectively contextualises migration within a broader framework of violence and border control.

Scene one opens into darkness before lights fade in on a DJ booth and the voice of Lou Becker, an inflammatory radio host who attempts to stir up anti-immigrant hatred on his show:

> *In the darkness we hear short bits of audio from various radio stations as the dial moves in search of a station. Spanish language radio plays for a second or two, and then the dial stays on a station that is broadcasting in English. A jingle identifies the radio station as KRZT 1070. LIGHTS FADE in on LOU BECKER sitting at a DJ booth welcoming his listeners.*
>
> LOU: Good morning Phoenix! This is KRZT 1070. Welcome to Take Back America. My fellow Arizonans I am so proud of us for finally taking the correct measures to keep all the illegals out. Our lousy Government and the Bozo in office has been too

> weak to get the job done, so it was up to us to do it…and for that, many hate us. It took courage to do what we did. We have to stand proud in the face of adversity. We shall overcome. While protests at the state capital continue, we must hold firm to the belief that we are doing the right thing...This is not about racism or racial profiling. We are just sick of paying for all those illegals that come to our country and state to live and breed like cockroaches. What do you think? I want to hear your thoughts. What can we do to stay strong and continue the fight to take back America?... So let's get this tea party started (22).

Becker also hosts a number of similarly minded callers to his show, thus making the anti-immigrant rhetoric in this opening scene immediate and shocking. What Tiffany Ana López (2011) terms 'the rhetoric of hate' had begun to permeate 'the cultural landscape, from the legislature to the media' after the passing of SB 1070, and this is definitely foregrounded in the play (17). In stark contrast to the reactionary opinions of the many phone callers to his show, Becker also hosts Ernesto Martinez the leader of Border Angels and the number one enemy of Becker's demographic and of the right-wing anti-immigrant border patrol group 'The Minute Men.'[2] Border Angels want immigration reform and controversially supply water containers in the desert to help those who attempt to cross the border. During an on-air argument between Becker and Ernesto, he repeatedly attempts to explain his life saving work as a form of resistance to Becker's Tea Party politics, and as a challenge to media stereotypes and hysteria:

> LOU: Aren't you encouraging people to cross the border by putting water out there? Aren't you enticing them to cross the border by making it easier to cross the desert?
> ERNESTO: Its seventy-six miles of desert! No human being would cross the border and risk their life just to get my water. Things have to be dire and desperate for someone to decide to cross the border. Every day one person dies crossing that border.

LOU: If they cross the border illegally, then they deserve it!

ERNESTO: No human being deserves to die alone in a desert trying to feed their families. Everyone has a right to survive and strive for a better life- (24).

These on air arguments in Scene 1 highlight the humanitarian efforts of community groups along the border, but this sense of humanitarianism is quickly dissipated in Scene 2 as the focus of the play 'jump cuts' to a young couple who are driving through the night, unaware of how close they are to the border.

During the scene Sandi, 'a second-generation Latina' who appears 'dark skinned and almost looks Native American,' and her Canadian boyfriend, are racially profiled by an Arizona police officer: 'ARIZONA POLICEMAN: Son, it is a crime to transport an illegal alien in exchange for sexual favors. SANDI: What?! I'm not an illegal alien!...I don't have a "Greencard" or any documents with me because I am a U.S. citizen, and I don't need to carry any!' (31-32) The dialogue between Sandi and the law enforcement officer demonstrates how he perceives her to be an undocumented border crosser offering sex for safe passage to the United States. López ironically highlights the inequality of this situation in a number of ways as we also learn that the fiancé Matt is in effect undocumented as he has a stolen identity and papers. Later in the play we also learn that Becker only became a US citizen through marriage. Sandi on the other hand owns all the relevant identification papers as a U.S citizen, but refuses on principle to co-operate with the law. Her arrest and the subsequent scenes focus on various spaces of violent assault, apprehension and detention. Contrasts and fading in lighting and the use of 'jump cuts' between scenes heighten the drama as the parallel storylines of Sandi and Becker converge and contrast. Becker is kidnapped and taken into the desert where he is bound, gagged and physically experiences the hatred that he encourages on his show. Whereas Sandi appears on stage 'dishevelled' and 'in a light blue uniform' and is

physically dragged handcuffed to an interrogation room where she is badly beaten before being detained,

> *Although we don't see anyone, there are several voices speaking in Spanish and other foreign languages…they are all sad voices of people in dire situations. There is also crying heard. SANDI hums, but before she realises it, she too, is crying* (40).

Sandi's violent and bewildering experiences are typical of many women who suffer detention and are in 'dire situations' facing possible deportation or protracted imprisonment. The disembodied 'sad' Spanish voices that are heard are suggestive of the numerous Central American women and children seeking asylum from violence in their home countries and who are wrongly imprisoned in detention facilities along the border. These scenes deliberately foreground the gendered violence of the brutal detention regime, and graphically highlight the psychologically traumatic and damaging effects experienced by women and children who are unnecessarily detained there.

Arguably it is these and the other scenes that involve Ernesto and Sandi that most fully embody what Diana Taylor (2006) terms 'trauma driven performance,' which is a form of performance that emphasises how trauma 'affects entire communities and mobilises demands for social justice' (1674-5).[3] When Ernesto takes a documentary film maker into the desert in Scene 7, Taylor's ideas of collective trauma and protest can be more clearly seen. Ernesto aims to make the film maker aware of the human cost of contemporary immigration policies, stating that there have been approximately 10,000 deaths since Operation Gatekeeper was brought into force, and how each day one or two people die in the desert. He relates how one 'of the worst deaths' he has witnessed continues to traumatise him:

> ERNESTO: One time when I was delivering water, I saw several empty bottles of water, trash, and a burnt out fire. As I got closer, I saw a woman lying down on the

> ground. She looked dead, but she was not dried up or damaged. She looked like she had been dead for maybe a day. Suddenly, her body started moving, and I got happy thinking she was still alive, and I could rush her to the hospital, and possibly save her life. When I got close to her body, I quickly jumped back, startled. A black snake slithered out of her mouth, and I saw her body wiggle as a five-foot snake came out of her. She was dead…I guess the group she was with had left her behind, and the animals…Ah…Well, I started crying…I think about the souls of the 10, 000 who have perished wandering the desert. I carry crosses in the desert. I carry crosses in my heart, for all these poor souls…Sometimes it's too much to bear, so I try not to think about it and keep busy. (*ERNESTO picks up empty containers*) (45).

This speech would both disconcert and encourage the audience to recognise in visceral ways how border control traumatises both individuals and communities. As Taylor (2006) states, 'Human Rights violations traumatise more than the immediate victims of "Barbarous Acts." They wound families, communities, and entire societies sometimes for years, even generations' (1674). The vernacular expressed in the speech, particularly the repetition of the word 'crosses' would give the woman's death added significance or 'presence' in a community based drama[4] (Fregoso 2006, 373). A number of other Chicana and Latina plays also use this symbolism for similar affect. Cherríe Moraga's (1994) play *Heroes and Saints* stages a ritual performance of the deaths of young children due to pesticide poisoning as a crucifixion, with the dramatically lit cross being central to the play (92). Moraga's play, like *Detained in the Desert*, also shows how death becomes a shared community space for the exchange of 'affect' and the performance of mourning. As a community based vernacular practice López would be aware of the use of 'affect' in staging public acts of mourning, and Ernesto's speech indicates her engagement with this practice (Fregoso 2006, 374). Ana Elena Puga (2011) provides an interesting discussion of what she terms 'the political economy of

suffering' in the exchange of affect in her recent discussion of the growing 'subgenre' of migrant melodrama (227). Puga (2011) asks whether the exchange of affect (i.e. migrant suffering for spectator sympathy) in melodrama constitutes 'a fantasy' of participation with the undocumented or can it really change hearts and minds? (228) Melodrama, she states, rather than aiming to enforce international and postnational rights, 'circumscribes its subjects' and 'limits their ability to exercise agency,' in the sense that it substitutes emotion for action (227-243). López's use of affect in *Detained in the Desert* is on the contrary a means to promote action and agency. As the play is 'trauma driven,' it advances awareness and protest as a means 'to address the society wide repercussions of violent politics' (Taylor 2006, 1674).

Ernesto's speech reflects a religious and morally based vernacular tradition that is evident in collective political protest throughout the US-Mexico border (Fregoso 2006, 374).The play reflects this sense of morality on a number of levels. The audience are prompted to consider the moral 'consequences of laws like SB 1070' for instance (Huerta 2011, 7). Becker's kidnapping and punishment in the desert where he is subjected to revenge attacks for perpetrating anti-immigrant hatred on his show, is also presented as a moral dilemma. The narrative structure of the play also moves towards and closes on a note of symbolic moral reconciliation when both Becker and Sandi are rescued by Ernesto from certain death. Fregoso (2006) states that this tradition of 'religious based morality' on the border, actively encourages protest and 'collective condemnation'; more specifically it stages a 'postnational challenge' to U.S. immigration policies (374).Similarities between the attention drawn to these issues, the feminicides of Cuidad Juarez and the South American 'disappeared' can also be seen through scenes such as these. In *Performance* (2016) Diana Taylor directly relates the Chilean disappeared to state violence and the production of 'The non person, the body that suffers and dies, the body made invisible, but also the body as the

zone of confrontation between political, religious and economic powers' (116). In a similar way, the woman's death in *Detained in the Desert*, highlights migrant subjection to state violence and erasure, and through the playwright's construction, works towards forming transnational affective communities both within the structures of the play and among audience members.

Scene Nine marks a radical break in the prior representational structures of the play, when the realist narrative is interrupted by a non-realistic mode of staging. The non realist mode of staging discussed here is not magical realism as the playwright has publicly 'decried' its influence on her work (Huerta 2011, 7). Instead this scene recalls the tradition in American ethnic writing of representing hidden or unseen histories as hauntings. Cherríe Moraga's early play, *Giving up the Ghost* (1984), Maxine Hong Kingston's, *The Woman Warrior: A Girlhood Among Ghosts* (1976), and Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* (1988) among many others, express a hidden or occluded history through haunting. In *Detained in the Desert* the haunting scenes express Taylor's (2006) ideas of 'mitigating' the personal and collective effects of trauma most clearly (1676). Crucially, as in all trauma narratives, the effectivity of these scenes depends on those who can 'bear witness' to the traumatic acts realised on stage and would as such specifically appeal to Latina/o community members in the audience (T. Lopez 2011, 17). The ghost of a woman named Milagros who appears to Sandi in the detention centre reveals the trauma of losing her children after a night time IRS raid, 'They are taking them away from me, and I'll never see them again! Ay, mis hijos…[Oh, my children…]' (50) Her desperation and loss of her children symbolically unites her narrative with the myth of *La Llorona*, the transnational myth of the ghostly weeping woman of Mexican folklore. This myth connects Milagros' story with countless other women south of the border in Guatemala, El Salvador, Chile, and Argentina… 'who join together with other women… demanding that their children's disappearances be

acknowledged and explained' (Saldívar-Hull 2000, 126). The ghost of Artemio, another border crosser who meets a traumatic, violent end and whose remains are left in the desert, appears to both Sandy and Becker and is similarly imagined to Milagros as a figure of trauma and loss. In retelling this unseen history through a non realist mode the playwright reintegrates the original trauma of their deaths into a collective narrative and understanding. The play thus makes the deaths of the many undocumented migrants on the U.S-Mexico border political and their disappearances 'visible' and 'nameable' (Taylor 2016, 25). Whereas border policy and control aims to erase the political presence of undocumented people, and restrict them in categories that stress their anonymity, the play overall crucially serves as a means to raise public awareness.

In conclusion, migration and the movement of refugees across national borders are issues that are currently dominating headlines around the world. From the recent appalling scenes associated with border crossing in Europe, to the working conditions of the undocumented workers in Spain and the UK, to the plight of those who attempt to cross the US-Mexico border, migration has become a major humanitarian and political crisis across the globe. A comparative analysis of these two Chicana plays reveals similarities in terms of the focus the playwrights place on border crossing, and the concerns they share with the welfare of women. Despite the differences in time and radical changes to how the US-Mexico border is policed and controlled, close readings of the plays reveal similarities in how they realise these issues on stage. Both playwrights dynamically highlight the effectivity of transnational networks in mitigating the effects of racism and trauma, and through various 'hidden' or undocumented acts they also suggest how an ethnic sense of selfhood and community can be realised and reclaimed.

Notes

[1] This bewildering experience is similar to what Gloria Anzaldúa refers to as '*Nepantla*.' This is the 'Náhuatl word for an in-between state, that uncertain terrain one crosses when moving from one place to another… The Mexican immigrant at the moment of crossing the barbed wire fence into a hostile "paradise" of *el norte*, the U.S., is caught in a state of *nepantla*' (Anzaldúa 2009:180).

[2] The playwright makes a special dedication to the work of Enrique Morales founder of Border Angels and to 'all the activists and humanitarians' and the 'migrants who have died crossing-you are not forgotten' (López 2011,15).

[3] Lopez's play can be considered as 'trauma driven performance' in the sense that it is a performative response to changes in the law and an increase in 'necropolitics' and violence towards migrants. The play is also based on research that included 'studying performed struggles at the U.S. Arizona-Mexico border between humanitarian activists and vigilante Minutemen types' (T. Lopez 2011, 17).

[4] Fregoso acknowledges the use of Saskia Sassen's term 'the production of presence' (373). See for instance, Saskia Sassen, (2005) 'The Repositioning of Citizenship and Alienage: Emergent Subjects and Spaces for Politics' (79-94).

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